

Part of

Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus



Guidance

Awarding qualifications in summer 2021

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Introduction

On 6 January 2021, the government confirmed that in summer 2021, students taking GCSE, AS and A levels regulated by Ofqual, should be awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers.

We conducted a two-week consultation to seek views on [how best to provide alternative arrangements to this year’s exams](#). A joint consultation was held at the same time on how to award vocational, technical and other general qualifications.

This guidance outlines the decisions taken to support students and teachers following the consultation. It covers the arrangements for undertaking assessments, the quality assurance and appeals processes and the awarding process for vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications.

Assessment evidence

Teachers can use a range of evidence to make a judgement of the grade they are performing at. Students should only be assessed on what they have been taught, ensuring sufficient coverage of the curriculum to enable progression. When determining the grade, teachers should reflect the standard at which the student is performing now, not their potential.

Teachers should use the time remaining to balance continued teaching with any assessments they want to undertake. Work done at home can be included as evidence to support a teacher’s judgement if it cannot be produced in the school or college environment because of the pandemic, and where teachers are confident that it is a student’s own work.

Types of assessment evidence

Teachers can use evidence to determine grades from across the duration of the student’s course.

We recommend the following range of evidence is used, where available:

- student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by the exam board, including groups of questions, past papers or similar materials such as practice or sample papers
- non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework), even if this has not been fully completed
- student work produced in centre-devised tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as exam board materials and have been marked in a way that reflects exam board mark schemes - this can include:
  - substantial class or homework (including those that took place during remote learning)
  - internal tests taken by pupils
  - mock exams taken over the course of study
- records of a student’s capability and performance over the course of study in performance-based subjects such as music, drama and PE
- records of each student’s progress and performance over the course of study

Deciding how to balance different sources of evidence

Centres should bear in mind the following factors in deciding how to balance different sources of evidence.

When the evidence was produced

More recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance, although there may be exceptions.

What students were asked to do

Centres should aim to use consistent sources of evidence for a class or cohort that relate closely to the specification requirements.

Some tiered GCSEs specify content for higher tier students only, and in all qualifications, centres will need to provide accessible questions and tasks for lower attaining students and appropriately demanding questions and tasks for higher attaining students to support higher grades.

How the evidence was produced

Centres should be confident that work produced is the student’s own and that the student has not been given inappropriate levels of support to complete it, either in the centre, at home or with an external tutor.

Exam boards will investigate instances where it appears that evidence is not authentic.

Making a judgement

Teachers should take account of the standard of any coursework undertaken by students in their overall judgement, including partially completed non-exam assessments where disrupted learning stopped them from completing it. Where this is the case, students should not be penalised.

Teachers should use these non-exam assessments in accordance with exam board mark schemes. Depending on the content they covered, the contribution that the non-exam assessments make to students’ overall grade should in the government’s view remain broadly similar to a normal year.

Exam boards will publish guidance in March, so teachers have a clear understanding of how to make fair and consistent judgements. Exam boards will also provide schools and colleges with support, guidance, and training on how to minimise the risk of bias and malpractice.

As far as possible, teachers should use the same types of evidence to form a judgment. When assessing different students in their cohort for a subject, schools and colleges should make formal reasonable adjustments for disabled students. If evidence is produced from assessments taken earlier in the course where formal reasonable adjustments were not in place, centres will be asked to take that into account in their judgement.

Assessment materials

The exam boards will provide assessment materials at the end of March. These will include sets of questions organised to help teachers quickly find questions in the topics they have taught.

These questions will be provided with mark schemes, exemplar responses and data on past performance where available, to assist teachers in making fair and consistent judgements of the standard of a student’s performance.

These materials will be available for all subjects apart from art and design.

Quality assurance

How schools and college will undertake quality assurance

Exam boards will publish requirements for schools’ and colleges’ quality assurance processes. Exam boards will review all schools’ and colleges’ quality assurance processes before they submit grades.

The head teacher or principal will submit a declaration to the exam board confirming they have met the requirements for quality assurance.

Schools and colleges can decide the exact timing for when they undertake internal quality assurance, provided they complete the necessary checks before the deadline to submit grades to the exam boards on 18 June.

How exam boards will undertake quality assurance

As well as the checks of schools’ and colleges’ quality assurance processes, exam boards will complete checks of the evidence for a sample of student grades in a sample of subjects, in a sample of schools and colleges over June and July.

The exam boards will determine which schools and colleges they visit, and which students’ evidence they review. The exam boards will decide whether the grades determined by the centre following quality assurance are a reasonable exercise of academic judgement of the students’ demonstrated performance. If they don’t find this to be the case the exam boards will ask the school or college to investigate.

Exam boards will not re-mark the student’s evidence or give an alternative grade. Grades would only be changed by the board if they are not satisfied with the outcome of an investigation or malpractice is found.

The sample of schools and colleges will take into account centre type and other characteristics of the centre and cohort. The exam boards will also check schools and colleges where concerns are highlighted as part of the initial external process checks. A check will also be triggered:

- if concerns have been raised or as a result of whistleblowing
- if a school or college’s results are out of line with expectations based on past performance
- where there have been significant changes in early entries
- where schools have previously received sanctions for malpractice or an investigation is ongoing

Appeals

Every student will have the right to appeal their grade if they so wish. Before a grade is submitted, teachers should make students aware of the evidence they are using to assess them. Students will then have the opportunity to confirm the evidence is their own work and make their teachers aware of any mitigating circumstances they believe should be taken into account.

If a student wishes to appeal, centres should undertake an initial process review to check all processes were followed correctly and no errors were made. If the school or college finds an error, they can submit a revised grade to the exam board.

If the student still wants to appeal, they will ask their school or college to submit a formal appeal to the exam board for them. The exam board will check the centre followed its own processes and exam board requirements as well as reviewing the evidence used to form their judgement and providing a view as to whether the grade awarded was a reasonable exercise of academic judgement.

If the exam board finds the grade is not reasonable, they will determine the alternative grade and inform the centre.

In cases of disagreement between the centre and the exam board, or if the student disagrees with the centre or the exam board, the case can be referred to Ofqual’s Exams Procedure Review Service (EPRS). The exam board’s decision on the grade following appeal will stand unless the EPRS finds that the exam board has made a procedural error.

Appeals are not likely to lead to adjustments in grades where the original grade is a reasonable exercise of academic judgement supported by the evidence. Grades can go up or down as the result of an appeal.

Results days

Students will receive their results for A/AS levels on the 10 August and GCSEs on the 12 August.

Results for relevant VTQs that are linked to progression to further or higher education, including some BTECs, will also be issued to students on or before these dates. Exam boards will begin to confirm their approach to VTQ results from 25 February.

Following the release of results, there will be a window for students who believe their grade is wrong to raise an appeal.

Exam boards will support schools and colleges in prioritising appeals where their outcome will determine a student’s ability to progress to their next stage of education or training.

Private candidates

Private candidates will be assessed in a similar way to other students, by a recognised exam centre using an adapted range of evidence, which includes taking the exam board provided assessment materials in a suitable form.

Centres will be asked to assess candidates based on what they have been taught. They will be allowed to conduct assessment remotely if necessary.

DfE will ensure that sufficient centres are available to assess private candidates and that the costs are not significantly increased compared to a normal year.

There will be a process for centres to express interest before the list is published. Following this, a list will be made available of centres willing to assess private candidates.

Ofqual will work to ensure exam boards provide sufficient guidance on an assessment approach and support materials to those centres that wish to carry out this role.

Vocational, technical and other general qualifications

This year there are 3 groups of vocational, technical and other general qualifications (VTQs) each with a different approach to awarding. Given the diversity of these qualifications, the precise arrangements will differ slightly but they will aim to provide as much fairness to students as possible.

Ofqual will put in place the technical framework needed to implement the arrangements for each of these groups and the qualifications in scope for each.

Qualifications used for progression to further or higher education

Exams will no longer be going ahead for VTQs most similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels that are used for progression to further or higher education. This will include many performance table qualifications.

These will receive results through alternative arrangements similar to those used for GCSEs, AS and A levels. This also includes other general qualifications such as:

- the International Baccalaureate
- Pre-U
- Core Maths
- Advanced Extension Awards
- Extended Project Qualifications

Qualifications used to enter directly into employment

VTQs used to enter directly into employment, exams or assessments should continue where they:

- are critical to demonstrate occupational or professional competence
- can be delivered in line with public health measures

Exams and assessments can take place in a controlled environment where the risk of transmission is low.

Protective measures should be put in place by schools, colleges or other providers, in line with [public health guidance to support exams](#).

Where the assessment cannot take place safely it will need to be delayed.

Other qualifications

For smaller qualifications that are not like GCSEs, AS or A levels exams and assessment should continue in line with public health measures, or remotely, but with alternative arrangements available for those who cannot access assessments. This includes functional skills qualifications and English as a second language.

When the approaches for each qualification will be confirmed

Awarding organisations will confirm and begin to communicate the final arrangements for these groups of qualifications from 25 February.

Ofqual will also provide, as they did last year, an online tool that sets out the approaches to individual qualifications.

How VTQ students can appeal their results

Schools, colleges and other providers wishing to appeal a VTQ result on behalf of a student should follow the process set out by the individual awarding organisation concerned.

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